

buildings. This provides the backdrop to the ostensible, observable activities of the people, yet is complemented by and influences those activities. But embracing and infusing both of these is a set of meanings for Camus—particularly the opposition of innocence and boredom.

These three components of place that are so apparent in Camus' writings—the static physical setting, the activities, and the meanings—constitute the three basic elements of the identity of places. A moment's reflection suggests that this division, although obvious, is a fundamental one. For example it is possible to visualise a town as consisting only of buildings and physical objects, as it is represented in air photographs. A strictly objective observer of the activities of people within this physical context would observe their movements much as an entomologist observes ants, some moving in regular patterns, some carrying objects, some producing objects, some consuming objects, and so on. But a person experiencing these buildings and activities sees them as far more than this—they are beautiful or ugly, useful or hindrances, home, factory, enjoyable, alienating; in short they are meaningful. The first two of these elements can probably be easily appreciated, but the component of significance and meaning is much more difficult to grasp.

The meanings of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them—rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences. Meanings can change and be transferred from one set of objects to another, and they possess their own qualities of complexity, obscurity, clarity, or whatever. All this is well illustrated in an example quoted by Stephan Strasser (1967, pp.508–509). In 1084 St. Bruno went to the French Alps to establish himself as a hermit there. Before his arrival the environment was quite neutral to him; it was what it was without meaning. But by seeking in those mountains a place to meditate St. Bruno and his followers made them meaningful in terms of this intention—they became 'dangerous' or 'safe', 'useful', or 'inhospitable'. And subsequently as their intentions changed, as they found a suitable site and began to look for land for cultivation, or as his followers now try to get rid of troublesome tourists, so their situation was modified. In other words the meaning of the situation, of the place, was defined by the intentions of St. Bruno and his followers. This is, of course, a very straightforward example; meaning is much more complex than this for intentionality is itself very complicated, involving both individual and cultural variations

which reflect particular interests, experiences and viewpoints. But the example of St. Bruno does serve to demonstrate that places can only be known in their meanings.

The three fundamental components of place are irreducible one to the other, yet are inseparably interwoven in our experiences of places. In explicating this experience, however, they can be identified as distinctive poles or focuses, and they can be further subdivided within themselves. Thus the physical component can be understood as comprising earth and sea and sky, and a built or created environment, each of which offers its own characteristic possibilities for experience (Dardel, 1952). Similarly activities and functions can be distinguished as being creative or destructive or passive, as communal or individual. The relative weighting of each of these subcomponents may be of considerable importance in establishing the identity of particular places—thus we recognise coal-mining towns or mountain villages. Artists, photographers, and novelists may even compress identity into one small feature which somehow captures the essence of a place; Wallace Stegner (1962) found that for him the spirit of his former home town of Whitemud on the Prairies was expressed above all in the smell of wolf-willow.

Such selection or concentration of the identity of a place into one feature depends, of course, on local circumstances and on the purposes and experiences of the author, and is not especially relevant to the present, more general discussion. What is significant here is the way in which physical setting, activities, and meanings are always interrelated. Like the physical, vital, and mental components of behaviour that Merleau-Ponty (1967) identifies, it is probable that they constitute a series of dialectics that form one common structure. Physical context and activities combine to give the human equivalent of locations within the 'functional circle' of animals (see Cassirer, 1970, p.26); setting and meanings combine in the direct and empathetic experience of landscapes or townscapes; activities and meaning combine in many social acts and shared histories that have little reference to physical setting. All of these dialectics are interrelated in a place, and it is their fusion that constitutes the identity of that place. Physical appearance, activities, and meanings are the raw materials of the identity of places, and the dialectical links between them are the elementary structural relations of that identity.

This analysis of the components of identity of place is not, however, complete. There is another important aspect or dimension of identity that is less tangible